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ABSTRACT

While many studies have compared race, sex, or social class differences in self-evaluation, the three have not been investigated simultaneously. To test the interaction of race, gender, and social class differences in self-evaluation and integrate it with the literature on sex role socialization, 57 black (29 females and 28 males) and 120 white (93 females and 27 males) college students were interviewed individually and completed a 15-item semantic differential scale for the concept "I Am." Factor analysis yielded five independent self-evaluation factors which were interpreted as dominated by either "instrumental" or "expressive" characteristics. Effects of gender, race, and social class were tested for all factors. Results showed that blacks had more positive self-evaluations on both "instrumental" and "expressive" factors. White females (but not black females) showed more negative, more stereotypic self-evaluations than did males. Black women viewed themselves as instrumentally competent, with a calm, inexpressive stance. These suggestive findings require replication with a more broadly representative sample. (Author/JAC)

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GENDER, RACE, SOCIAL CLASS AND SELF-EVALUATIONS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

GENDER, RACE, SOCIAL CLASS AND SELF-EVALUATIONS

College students rated themselves on a 15-item semantic differential scale. A factor analysis yielded five factors which were interpreted as dominated by either "instrumental" or "expressive" characteristics. Anovas indicated that blacks had more positive self-evaluations on both factors. White females (but not black females) showed more negative, more stereotypic self-evaluations than did the males.

GENDER, RACE, SOCIAL CLASS AND SELF-EVALUATIONS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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A voluminous literature indicates that women have lower self-esteem than do men, and that women rate themselves lower than do men on a variety of abilities and character traits (Crain and Weisman, 1972), with the exception of a few feminine stereotype traits (such as "nurturant"). There is evidence, however, that adult black women do not have as low self-esteem compared to black males as do white females compared to white males (Crain and Weisman, 1972). Research on black and white adolescents has found especially low self-esteem among white females (Rosenberg and Simmons, 1975).

Studies of social class differences in self-evaluations generally find that working and lower class individuals have lower self-esteem than middle class individuals (e.g., Heiss and Owens, 1972; Yancey, Rigsby and McCarthy, 1972). The more negative self-evaluations of lower status individuals are, in general, attributed to much the same sources as the supposed low self-esteem of blacks.

Many traditional theoretical lines support the notion that blacks should display more negative self-concepts than whites. Over a dozen major studies during the past decade, however, have found higher self-esteem among blacks than among whites (cf. Harris and Stokes, 1978). There has been considerable difficulty in evolving a theoretical basis for these counterintuitive empirical findings. Race, gender and social class differences in self-evaluations, however, have not often been investigated simultaneously. We contend that theoretical advance is more likely to be enhanced by joint

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examination of these variables.

Following a fresh theoretical tack, Heiss and Owens (1972) examined data from two large-scale surveys and concluded that the self-evaluations of blacks and whites did not differ on private-domain traits relevant to intimate interactions. The self-evaluations of blacks were more negative than those of whites only for public-domain traits pertinent to occupational competence. In essence, Heiss and Owens' formulation delineated traits as either expressive or instrumental.

The purpose of the present study was to (1) modify this theoretical framework and (2) integrate it with literature on sex-role socialization, thereby elaborating the instrumental-expressive dichotomy proposed by Heiss and Owens (1972), so as to (3) generate and test hypotheses regarding race, gender and social class differences (and their interactions) in self-evaluations.

Race Differences in Self-Evaluations.--Heiss and Owens found, as predicted, no race differences on private-domain traits. Two lines of reasoning lead us to predict that blacks' self-evaluations on private-domain traits will be more positive than those of whites. First, we suggest that current theories of self-evaluation have had difficulty accounting for findings indicating more positive self-evaluations among blacks than among whites because these theories place undue emphasis on "market" notions of worth. Since racism makes it impossible for blacks in general to reap as much benefit as white men from labor force participation, blacks may be likely to emphasize primary group activities in deriving their self-evaluations. Second, the content and process of sex-role socialization in Afro-American families, compared to that in Euro-American families, places less emphasis on gender distinctions (Lewis, 1975). Black children of both genders, as well as white female children, are socialized toward private-domain qualities--affective qualities important in intimate relationships. The emphasis is on strong interpersonal

connectedness in all three cases, but black children are far more likely than white female children to be encouraged toward individualism and assertiveness in interpersonal relationships.

Gender Differences in Self-Evaluations.--Theoretical and empirical considerations lead us to predict that compared to black females, white females will be especially unwilling to rate themselves positively on public-domain ("masculine") traits. This prediction is grounded, in part, in race differences in the process of socialization for gender roles during adolescence. Because blacks have been subjected to employment discrimination of varying degrees since the end of American slavery, black males historically have had considerable difficulty fulfilling the provider role. For this reason, black families have placed much greater emphasis than white families on socializing adolescent females for the provider role.

Hypotheses.--Specific hypotheses were as follows: on private-domain traits, we predicted (1) a main effect for race, in which blacks would evaluate themselves more positively than whites, and (2) a significant interaction of race and social class, in which low-status whites would evaluate themselves more negatively than would low-status blacks, whereas high-status blacks would not differ from high-status whites. On private-domain traits defining a feminine stereotype, we predicted that women would evaluate themselves more positively than would men regardless of race. On public-domain traits, we predicted that black females would evaluate themselves more positively than would white females, while black males would evaluate themselves less positively than would white males regardless of social class.

METHOD

Subjects.--The randomly selected sample consisted of 57 black and 120

white seniors at a large state university in the Northeast. There were 29 black females, 28 black males, 93 white females and 27 white males. Social class was dichotomized, using Warner's 7-point scale for father's occupation.

Procedures.--To enhance rapport, the race and gender of interviewers were matched to the race and gender of the respondents.

Information gathered during individual interviews over an hour in duration included a self-administered 15-item semantic differential scale (Osgood et. al., 1957) for the concept "I am". Each of the 15 items was scored on a positive-negative dimension such that the higher the score, the more positive the self-evaluation. Items were: Quick-Slow, Happy-Sad, Responsible-Irresponsible, Useful-Useless, Healthy-Sick, Trustworthy-Untrustworthy, Changing-Unchanging, Calm-Excited, Good-Bad, Giving-Taking, Strong-Weak, Reliable-Unreliable, Warm-Cold, Smart-Dumb, and Active-Passive. Adjective pairs with the "positive" and "negative" adjectives presented first were randomly alternated.

In order to (1) clarify the meaning of the evaluative concepts, (2) empirically establish the concepts classified as relevant to intimate interactions (i.e., private-domain) and those subject to white cultural norms (i.e., public-domain), (3) reduce the number of variables, and (4) create factor scales that would permit a test of the major hypotheses of this study, which focus upon the interaction of race, gender and social class across the entire sample, the 15 items for all respondents were submitted to a principal component factor analysis with orthogonal varimax rotations. Five independent self-evaluation factors emerged.

Of the five factors, shown in Table 1, only the second, named "Accountable-Instrumental", seems clearly to represent public-domain characteristics related

to a provider role. The third factor, named "Unconditional Giving", just as clearly represents a feminine stereotype of private-domain traits. The first and fifth factors, named "Vigorous-Warm" and "Steady", appear to capture private-domain characteristics related to primary-group norms. More than any of the other factors, the fourth factor, named "Happy-Healthy", contains both public and private-domain traits; thus no main effects or interactions were predicted for this factor.

RESULTS

Using a series of 2x2x2 ANOVAS, the effects of gender, race and social class were tested for each of the factor scores derived from the five factors. The mean factor scores for each gender-race-social class group are shown in Table 2.

Private-Domain Factors.--On Factor I, "Vigorous-Warm", the predicted race main effect was found ($F=7.67$, $p<.006$), in which blacks rated themselves more positively (that is, more strong, active, quick, warm and smart) than did whites. A main effect for social class also appeared ($F=4.84$, $p<.029$), in which high-status students rated themselves more positively than did low-status students. A gender x social class interaction appeared as well ($F=5.72$, $p<.018$), in which high-status males viewed themselves significantly more positively than all other gender-social class groups (for the comparison with low-status males, $t=2.62$, p .05; with high-status females, $t=-2.91$, $p<.005$; and with low-status females, $t=-3.50$, $p<.001$). The predicted interaction of race and social class failed to appear. As hypothesized, however, low-status whites did indeed evaluate themselves more negatively than did low-status blacks ($t=-2.91$, $p<.005$), while high-status whites and high-status blacks did not differ. The self-evaluations of high-status white males were strikingly positive on this factor, while the self-evaluations of low-status white males

were strikingly negative.

On Factor V, "Steady", the predicted race main effect appeared ($F=8.26$, $p<.005$), in which blacks rated themselves as more "steady" (that is, more calm, passive, strong and good) than did whites. A main effect for social class ($F=8.50$, $p<.004$) also appeared, in a direction contrary to that usually reported in the literature: low-status students rated themselves more positively than did high-status students. In addition, a three-way interaction between gender, race, and social class was found ($F=10.69$, $p<.001$), indicating an especially complex pattern of differences on this factor. Among blacks, as Table 2 indicates, high-status females were anomalous in rating themselves as significantly less "steady"; among whites, low-status males stand out in viewing themselves as quite "steady". Primarily, the variable interactions on this factor reflect the tendency of white females and high-status black females to rate themselves as less inexpressive than did the other groups.

The predicted interaction of race and social class on the "Steady" factor failed to appear. As predicted, however, low-status whites evaluated themselves more negatively than low-status blacks ($t=-3.09$, $p<.003$), while high-status blacks and high-status whites did not differ. The difference between low-status whites and blacks was entirely due to the negative self-evaluations of low-status white females; the mean score of low-status white males did not differ from those of low-status black males or females.

On Factor III, "Unconditional Giving", the feminine stereotype factor, the predicted gender main effect appeared ($F=10.12$, $p<.002$), in which females rated themselves more positively (that is, more giving, good, changing, reliable, trustworthy, and warm) than did males. There were no other main or interaction effects on this factor. White females rated themselves higher on

"Unconditional Giving" than did white males ($t=2.73$, $p<.01$) and black males ($t=-2.72$, $p<.01$). It is of interest that black females did not differ from any other group.

The Public-Domain Factor.--On Factor II, "Accountable-Instrumental", a race main effect was found ($F=4.06$, p .046), in which blacks rated themselves more positively than did whites. There were no other main or interaction effects on this factor. As predicted, black females rated themselves as more Accountable-Instrumental (that is, as more responsible, useful, quick and reliable) than did white females ($t=2.07$, $p<.042$). This finding, however, was entirely due to the significantly more positive self-evaluations of low-status black females compared to the white female groups (for the comparison with high-status white females, $t=-2.18$, $p<.039$; with the low-status white females, $t=-2.27$, $p<.030$). The mean score of high-status black females on Factor II did not differ from any of the other female groups. Contrary to prediction, a difference between black males and white males on this factor failed to appear.

The "Mixed" Factor.--Factor IV, "Happy-Healthy", contained both public- and private-domain traits. As predicted, no main or interaction effects appeared for this factor.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that follow must be regarded as tentative, based as they are on responses of a relatively small sample. It should be kept in mind, further, that the self-evaluations of students may differ from those of non-students in the American population. Indeed, the failure in this study to find the difference between white and black males on public-domain traits that has been reported in a large-sample survey on self-esteem (Heiss

and Owens, 1972) may simply indicate that the upwardly mobile black male students in this study were not representative of black male Americans.

Self-Evaluations on Private-Domain Characteristics.--The results for black-white differences on both private-domain factors are consistent with the basic postulates of this study, with the exception of the very positive self-evaluations of high-status white males on "Vigorous-Warm" and of low-status white males on "Steady". On private-domain characteristics of very different nature, therefore, blacks' self-evaluations are, in general, more positive than those of whites.

With regard to the hypotheses for "Vigorous-Warm", our error seems to have been that we failed to foresee the joint operation of superior gender status and favorable social class placement that would serve to enhance the self-confidence and assertiveness of high-status white males. We were probably not wrong, however, in assuming that subcultural norms accentuating interpersonal assertiveness in the black community would operate on this factor.

On "Steady", we failed to appreciate the operation of social forces, particularly those related to lower social class placement, that might serve to inhibit emotional expressiveness. Here, more than on any other factor, the dynamics underlying gender, race and social class interact to produce a complex web of findings. The findings for low-status white males perhaps exemplify a white male stereotype (the "strong, silent type") but, except for low-status white females, all the low-status groups similarly tended to be strong and silent. Social class is important for self-evaluations on private-domain characteristics. In this sample, lower-status white males, in particular, combined unassertiveness and low self-confidence with an inexpressive stance. While subcultural norms for the behavior of lower-status

white males may, to some degree, have determined the latter finding, the low self-confidence of these men probably reflects the pressures of more general social forces. Lower-status white males, in particular, seem unable to escape the onus of lower social class placement.

With regard to the more expressive mean scores of white females and high-status black females on Factor V, "Steady", we did not foresee the pressures exerted by traditional socialization for females to be excited--emotionally expressive--rather than calm (and, therefore, more rather than less active).

The "Feminine Stereotype" Private-Domain Factor.--With the exception of the finding that black females did not differ from any other group, the findings for this factor are consistent with the basic postulates of this study. It is white females, it appears, whose socialization emphasizes selfless nurturance.

The Public-Domain Factor.--On this factor, "Accountable-Instrumental", low-status black females evaluated themselves more positively than did white females, while black males' self-evaluations did not differ from those of white males. The academic success experienced by these upwardly mobile black male seniors may explain the latter finding. We were probably not wrong in assuming that black females were more likely than white females to be socialized to the provider role, but we did not sufficiently appreciate the special emphasis this training might receive in lower status black families. Finally, when gender and social class are controlled, there is no evidence in our data for the assumption that blacks will evaluate themselves more negatively on public-domain traits relevant to occupational and instrumental competence than will whites.

The self-concepts of the lower-status black women studied were especially striking, with their emphatic view of self as instrumentally competent; their

intermediate scores on the feminine stereotype factor; and their calm, inexpressive stance. It appears to us that these lower-status black women exemplify the instrumental role of "one who holds together no matter what". These suggestive findings, however, require replication with a larger and more broadly representative sample.

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TABLE 1

"I Am" Factors

Factor Names	Primary Loadings		% of Variance	Salient Characteristics
I. Vigorous-Warm	Strong-Weak	.63	47.6	High scores view themselves as more strong, active, quick, warm, and smart
	Active-Passive	.58		
	Quick-Slow	.52		
	Warm-Cold	.45		
	Smart-Dumb	.24		
II. Accountable-Instrumental	Responsible-Irresponsible	.71	18.5	High scores view themselves as more responsible, useful, quick and reliable
	Useful-Useless	.70		
	Quick-Slow	.34		
	Reliable-Unreliable	.27		
III. Unconditional Giving	Giving-Taking	.58	14.8	High scores view themselves as more giving, good, changing, reliable, trustworthy, and warm
	Good-Bad	.48		
	Changing-Unchanging	.41		
	Reliable-Unreliable	.40		
	Trustworthy-Untrustworthy	.38		
	Warm-Cold	.25		
IV. Happy-Healthy	Happy-Sad	.52	11.0	High scores view themselves as more happy, healthy, trustworthy, and good
	Healthy-Sick	.43		
	Trustworthy-Untrustworthy	.42		
	Good-Bad	.36		
V. Steady	Calm-Excited	.52	8.1	High scores view themselves as more calm, passive, strong, and good
	Active-Passive	-.31		
	Strong-Weak	.31		
	Good-Bad	.25		

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TABLE 2

Mean "I Am" Factor Scores

Race	Sex	Social Class	N	Factor I Vigorous-Warm	II Accountable-Instrumental	III Unconditional Giving	IV Happy-Healthy	V Steady
Black	Female	High	15	.22	.08	-.01	-.20	-.25
		Low	14	.12	.39	.03	-.01	.76
	Male	High	7	.43	.54	-.06	-.20	.46
		Low	21	.29	-.08	-.35	-.06	.28
White	Female	High	56	-.09	.00	.22	.08	-.25
		Low	37	-.20	-.09	.13	.14	-.12
	Male	High	11	.62	-.12	-.28	-.04	-.19
		Low	16	-.54	-.24	-.40	-.19	.32

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